



BY MRS. BURTON HARRISON.

A PROUD title—the First Lady of the Land—and one that shines like a far beacon in the eyes of the American girl, who never knows what marriage may do in hoisting her to the elevation where she may claim it as her own! Yet the position of wife of the President of the United States has, with conspicuous exceptions, not been filled by women who



MRS. JOHN ADAMS.

have left a marked impression upon their day and administration.

Birth to the purple makes, of course, little difference in a nation where the adaptability of its daughters to high place is continually illustrated—when the child of an American dry-goods man has put her little foot upon the neck of British India as wife of its Viceroy; when the bench of English Duchesses is dashingely reinforced by the descendants of self-made Americans, and all the nobilities of Europe are paying court to the chic American beauties they have annexed to strengthen their failing order.

It must be remembered that some of our

Presidents' wives do not appear before the public until they have become, perhaps, set in the homely and retiring habits of life from which the nation's trumpet-call has summoned them. The sovereign ladies of Europe are all educated from the cradle with a view to exercising tact, finesse, imper-turbable dignity, toward their fellow-man. They are skilled linguists, acquainted with art and literature, able to interest themselves in affairs of diplomacy and statecraft, to face crowds with superb equanimity, to serve as high ornaments of society, if no more. Our republican queens sometimes arrive at the White House feeling em-



MRS. MONROE.

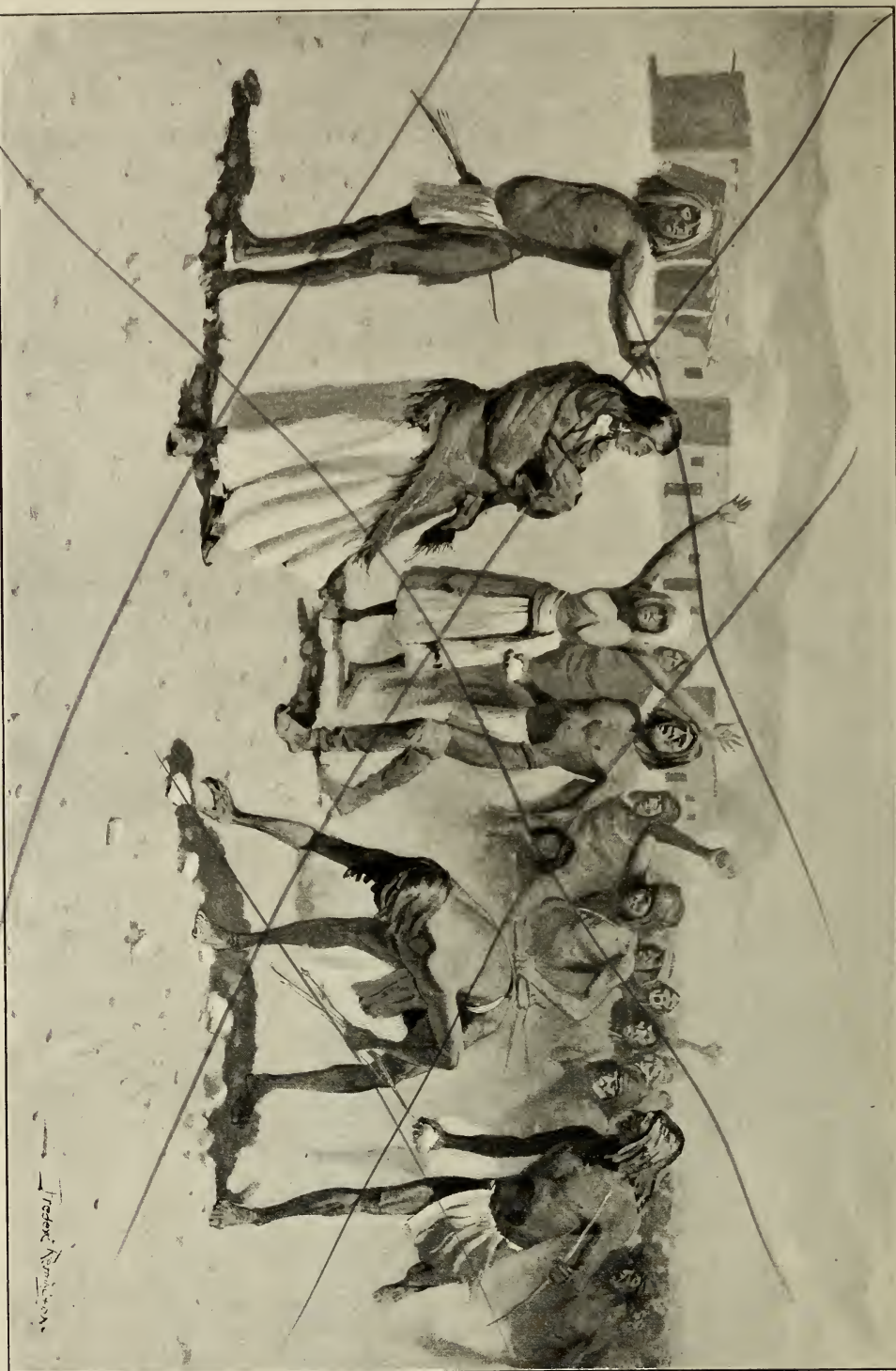
barrassed by social exigencies; never having previously worn the low-cut corsage exacted for robes of ceremonial; possessing no facility for dinner-table talk, with only the mother-tongue at their command; and generally oppressed by necessary public appearances. One of these has little precedent, and no established rule of dignified habit to hold up her hands. Into her present place of extraordinary prominence she may have stepped from



MRS. JOHN QUINCY ADAMS.

Drawn by Frederic Koenigsmann.

"SHE NOTICED THAT ALL, EVEN THE CHILDREN, GATHERED UP STONES AS THEY WENT."



some remote community where the customs of social intercourse are the offspring of ignorance of the world and dire monotony. Her backers and counselors are, like herself, new to the task. The society before which she must appear is critical, sharp-tongued, on the qui vive for a fresh sensation, and not always under bonds to high patriotism. This ceremony of the installation of an unknown new-comer among them has been so often repeated

that perchance the process has hardened their sense of hospitality, as well as their imagination. Then, again, whatever may be her social intuitions and ambitions, the lady of the White House knows herself to be a creation of universal suffrage, and during her four brief years of power must always bear that fact in mind. If she moves to right or left out of the beaten track of her predecessors;

if she projects reforms hygienic or sanitary in her new home; still more, should she attempt to introduce innovations that savor of high life or Old-World custom of courts, in an instant the whole press of the country will be belaboring her with acute personal criticism.

The "fierce light" of publicity has, indeed, "beat" upon her ever since the nomination of her husband to his lofty

post. The election was a signal for innumerable paragraphs in print, exploiting her previous life and surroundings in all attainable phases. The great affectionate public has then to be fed with morsels of gossip revealing her most intimate domestic affairs, and the same thing goes on at intervals during her sojourn in Washington. The exaggerations of statement thus engendered are, surely, enough to paralyze an ordinary woman's enjoyment of exist-

ence, and must exact sympathy from all toward the innocent object of their perhaps unintended malevolence.

Should a political cabal arise into which unscrupulous wire-pullers may drag a President's personal affairs to the advantage of his enemies, no respect for the First Lady of the Land can control its mischief. As an instance of this latter fact, one recalls the secret history



MRS. MADISON.

of an incident occurring at a critical period of national affairs within the last fifteen years, when the clever and plucky wife of a Cabinet Minister was enabled to bestow upon a prominent statesman of the party in politics opposing that in power, an effectual and well-deserved quietus.

Having traced to this leader a series of offensive stories in circulation involving the alleged domestic infelicities of the



MRS. VAN BUREN.

Executive family, she expressed herself with great vigor in denouncing them. This brought upon her a letter from him, couched in peremptory and threatening language, demanding to know whether she was indeed the author of such utterances—a letter sent by a messenger-boy, and bearing outside the insolent superscription, "Wait for Answer."

In the absence of her husband, she penned and addressed to the statesman in question a letter overflowing with righteous wrath at the misstatements, contradicting them upon her own intimate authority, and condemning anew the cowardice of such an attack upon those who might not defend themselves. Then, unwilling to dispatch it without taking counsel of a cooler head, she sent for a member of the Cabinet, her own and her husband's friend of years, and asked for his opinion of the letter. His answer was unhesitating in its indorsement of the accuracy and dramatic effectiveness of what she had written; but he would not assume the responsibility of advising her to send it. She hesitated for a moment, then sent the letter, with an invitation to give it to the public. The effect was silence, full and complete, in the enemy's camp, a silence remaining unbroken as far as the charges in question were concerned; and the consulting friend spoke afterward of her effort as a masterpiece of eloquence and feeling. The grave has closed upon the bright energy of this lady's mind and heart, as upon the animos-

ities of her brilliant opponent, but her championship was far-reaching in result.

Certainly, the position of the President's wife looks, on the face of it, to be an ideal one for an ideal American woman—the spouse, helpmate, comrade, of the first citizen of a grand free nation, neither he nor she bound by the gyves of tiresome dress, or ceremonial, or title, before the public. When she throws open her doors to receive her friends, they are the nation's friends who swarm across her threshold. At the levees every man,

woman and child in decent garb has a right to grasp her hand and claim her personal interest. This accomplished, nothing more is expected of her in the way of visits, receptions, or the treadmill round of an ordinary woman's duties to society. But withal, the yoke is heavy.

At the state banquets of the White House, occurring several times during the winter season, are successively entertained the heads of government, army and navy, the diplomatic corps, with their wives and daughters, celebrities visiting Washington, and others desirable so to distinguish. These



MRS. DONELSON.

(Wife of President Jackson's Private Secretary.)

guests are arranged at table according to time-honored precedent, and offer small opportunity for the hostess' sway. Except in the case of Mrs. Hayes, who suppressed wine and substituted coffee to accompany her husband's official feasts, we have little record of feminine individuality expressed in such a quarter. A tale is told of the late Hon. J. Randolph Tucker, of Virginia, a delicious and unforgettable wit, who coming upon a course of Roman punch served by the White House chef in small boat-shaped glasses,



MRS. TYLER.

MRS. SEMPLE.
(President Tyler's Daughter.)

MRS. ROBERT TYLER.

and detecting its undercurrent of Jamaica rum, ecstatically proclaimed it to his neighbors as "the Life-Saving Station of a Hayes administration dinner."

There is, of course, lacking at the President's official table that display of gold and silver plate and priceless porcelain brought from the store-vaults of royalty abroad to deck a similar festivity. At many private houses in Washington the service is ten-fold more beautiful and striking. The flowers and plants from the White House conservatories are the chief dependence of the stewards for decoration, as also for garnishment of the large rooms of state thrown open to the public at levees.

The First Lady of the Land cannot, like thousands of the women who envy her from a distance, indulge in drawing-rooms filled with screens and cushions and encumbering bric-à-brac. Such belongings of her own are reserved for her private apartments. To the public she must stand revealed in spaces where a mirror is an event, a clock or vase an exciting incident. As all the world knows, the establishment of the White House is mounted on very simple lines. The astonishment, the rueful swallowing of first emotion, the determination to be pleased, *quand même*, is an ever-recurring feature of the introduction of fresh arrivals in the diplomatic corps at the Presidential mansion. Accustomed, as they are, to the pomp and state hedging in the Old-World ruler from intercourse with his subjects, they at first deem belittling the freedom of access to our Chief Magistrate and his wife. But as Bryce has so finely said, "To an European observer weary of the slavish obsequiousness and lip-deep adulation with which the

members of reigning families are treated on the eastern side of the Atlantic, fawned on in public and carped at in private, the social relations of an American President

to his people are eminently refreshing. There is great respect for the office, and a corresponding respect for the man as the holder of the office, if he has done nothing to degrade it. There is no servility, no fictitious self-abasement, on the part of the citizens, but a simple and hearty deference to one who represents the majesty of the nation, the sort of respect

which the proudest Roman paid to the consulship, even if the particular consul was, like Cicero, a 'new man.' "

It is her pride in this condition of things, her consciousness that, in spite of all the stings and arrows of outrageous gossip and journalism, her choice of a man has proved the choice of many millions of his countrymen, that must give her best happiness to the First Lady in the Land.

Nothing connected with the home life of the President's wife so marks her difference in style from the other leaders of Washington society as the absence from White House doors and lobbies of proper conventional servants. At one of the great evening receptions or levees where all the world comes, a mob of well-dressed people are first herded in a portico, then driven desperately ahead by the impact of a new crowd upon their heels, to bring up, breathless and battered, in a corridor on the threshold of the republican court group. What is not done for their wraps by a very few negro waiters, is effected by the guests themselves, and a moment more sees them again part of a human stream, now forcing its way into the presence-chamber, where

MRS. TYLER.
(Second Wife.)



MRS. POLK.

passing as she desires to have stand behind her in the line during the reception, gives

to many an agreeable opportunity to view the passing show to capital advantage. In the bowery precincts formed by palms, acacias and numerous flowers, the elect may survey at their ease the distinctive and characteristic procession that makes up a great Washington assemblage, paying its respects to an office "the greatest in the world except the Papacy." Men and women of many conditions in life, of almost every nationality, of wide and



MRS. PIERCE.

the President, his wife, and the ladies of the Cabinet, according to their order of precedence, stand in line to receive. The pleasant custom of the Lady of the White House, of singling out such of her friends and guests in

hand-shakers down the line, after a greeting of which the cordial charm robbed the action of its bitterness.

After a walk around the beautiful and imposing East Room, where the throng is generally oppressive,



MRS. FILLMORE.

it is in order for the company, in general, to retire. Here, again, the want of proper service is noticeable. The same negroes are driven hither and thither in the search for wraps and hats, jovial, nay mirthful, at the expense of such unfortunates as fail to reclaim their own proper belongings. An amazing contrast these myrmidons of democracy present to the chamberlains, the grooms-in-waiting, the smug, silent, perfectly trained menials,



MISS FILLMORE.

picturesque variety in costume, defile before the receiving party, shaking hands persistently with the President and his wife, who evoke from lookers-on in the rear genuine sympathy in their submission to this senseless national custom. One recalls Mrs. Cleveland's gentle but vigorous method of consigning

of a foreign royal residence. One of the stringent rules of Windsor Castle is that no servant on entering a room where the Queen is may raise his eyes to look at her. We fail to imagine a merry darkey of the White House underworld refraining from a gaze upon, or even a salutation to, his liege lady, if it occurred to him to bestow it.

This, however, is the nation's part of her Chief Magistrate's domestic arrangements. Should one be honored by an invitation to remain to supper with the

presidential party, there is a little informal gathering around small tables in the corridor upstairs, where the atmosphere is like that of a delightful private house, and the arrangements, although simple, leave nothing to be desired.

The same conditions prevail whenever the First Lady chooses to convene her friends in private—at luncheon, or dinner, or to an afternoon "At Home," where tea is served at five o'clock. When she drives out, in a plain brougham or landau, equipped with a coachman and footman in plain livery, hers is not in any way noticeable in a crowd of other vehicles. Although, officially, precedence is accorded her over every other woman in her presence, there are none of the outward and visible signs of sovereignty to distinguish her in public. She is no leader in fashion, has no social weight as a dictator, is rarely quoted in matters of form or expressions of preference. Best of all, provided the press of the country can be induced to spare her absurd paragraphs regarding her private life, which her exalted position forbids her to contradict, she is, at least during the months when the climate exiles her from Washington, able to fashion her life according to her own and her family's will and taste.

But a month or two since, was celebrated in Washington the one-hundredth anniversary of the establishment of the seat of government in the District of Columbia. The White House, planned, built, and subsequently rebuilt, by an Irishman named Hoban, was not in the beginning quite the same beautiful building, with its stuccoed front and four stately Doric pillars, which we see to-day, and to which the twentieth century promises expansion without serious change in its charming and familiar lines.

The first lady to inhabit it officially—Mrs. John Adams—beheld from her windows even less to allure the eyes than was pictured by Tom Moore on his visit to Washington some years later:—



MRS. JOHNSON.

"An embryo capital, where
Fancy sees
Squares in morasses, obelisks
in trees,
Where second-sighted seers
the plain adorn
With fanes unbuilt, and
heroes yet unborn,
Though naught but woods
and Jefferson they see
Where streets should run
and sages ought to be."

To-day, Mrs. McKinley takes her drives abroad amid "fanés" and "obelisks" and "squares" in such number and beauty, and of proportions so imposing, that the "second-sighted seers" of the satirical little poet's imagination could scarce have dreamed of them.

Mrs. Washington, the "double First" Lady of our Land, would, doubtless, have enjoyed in that capacity a sojourn nearer than New York to her beloved home on the highlands of the Potomac. The "swampy woodlands" around the new White House would have been more congenial to the first President's wife than the Northern cities to which she was transplanted. What though "the General" had been annoyed and crossed in his projects for the national capital by the "obstinate Mr. Burns," a Scotch landholder

who refused to part with his cottage and six hundred and fifty acres of unprofitable soil lying directly in the way of the intended town? What though the recalcitrant Burns had even made himself so unpleasant as to suggest that George Washington had attained his prominence through possessing himself of the "Widow Custis and her niggers"? Dear to Mrs. Washington's gentle heart was the Southern country, and it was there she fain would have been. Witness an extract from a letter written by her to her niece, Fanny, in Virginia, while the new sovereign lady was in full flush of her honors in the presidential house

MRS. HARRIET LANE
JOHNSTON.
(Niece of President Buchanan.)

MRS. LINCOLN.

MRS. PATTERSON.
(Daughter of President Johnson.)



MRS. GRANT.

are certain bounds which I must not depart from, and as I cannot do as I like, I am obstinate and stay at home a great deal."

And this while the Very First Lady was in the habit of showing herself in public in a coach of cream and gold with six horses and outriders; when her Friday evenings were thronged with the beauty and fashion and distinction of the first administration period. Truly, the heart of a good woman clings healthily to first principles.

Abigail Adams, wife of the second President, the first lady to occupy the Executive Mansion—over which, it must be owned, she grumbled and fussed vigorously, objecting to the removal from gay Philadelphia to forlorn Washington—had previously enjoyed a long training in the ways of courts and rulers. She had made part of high society in England when her husband was the first diplomatic representative of his country at the Court of St. James, and had traveled on the Continent, meeting and noting many interesting persons. As wife of Washington's Vice-President, she had been a power in administration circles in New York and Philadelphia. She was a bright, cheery, quick-witted woman, with a keen sense of fun, some tendency toward ridicule, and much adaptability to circumstances. Her letters, apart from their chronicle of events, are distinctly good reading, and her sway at the White House set a high

in Cherry Street, Manhattan: "I live a very dull life here, and know nothing of what passes in the town. I never go to any public place, indeed I think I am more like a state prisoner than anything else. There

standard of social elegance for her successors to maintain.

Mr. Jefferson, on becoming President, was a widower, and his young married daughter—she whom Randolph of Roanoke styled the noblest woman in Virginia—was supremely

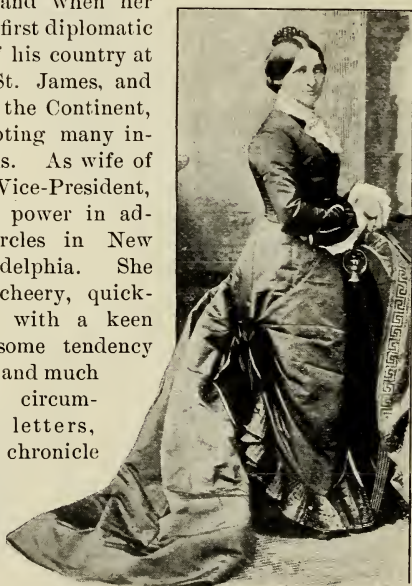


MRS. GARFIELD.

occupied with the cares of a young family at Monticello. The President had thought to rid himself of one feature of the cares of sovereignty by abolishing the levees bequeathed to him by his predecessors in office. But he reckoned without his guests, since some of the dames and damsels of Washington, resenting this infringement of their social privileges, once descended upon the White House in a flock, and were found by the President, on his return, muddy and weary, from a ride, occupying the accustomed room of state. To provide against such forays in the future, Mr. Jefferson solicited and obtained aid in social matters from the accomplished and capable Mrs. Madison, who, in the absence of the ladies of his family, thereafter presided when called upon by the much-beset Executive. It is a pity that Martha Jefferson Randolph does not take her full place among the galaxy of dames châtelaines of the White House, where her beauty, high breeding, and distinction in culture, would have left a notable mark.

Of Mrs. Madison, affectionately known to history as "Dolly Madison," so much in latter years has been said and written that it is only necessary to recall the fact that she was a widow of Quaker ancestry when Mr., afterward President, Madison married her in 1794. A tradition of her youth in Philadelphia told how her admirers would stand at street-corners only to see her pass.

During the reign of this charming personage, social life at the White House received a new impetus. There was an immediate refflorescence of the



MRS. HAYES.



MRS. MC'ELROY.
(Sister of President Arthur)

direct imitation of "Dolly" Madison's own especial "parlor" at the White House, and as such guarded intact by the generations succeeding those who adorned it. The stiff sofas, and many high-backed chairs, were of mahogany, covered in sunflower-yellow damask; a row of high windows was curtained in the same stuff; a valance of the damask, edged with a delightful "long and short drop" fringe, made over bits of wood, ran upon rods entirely around the upper portion of the walls, and was festooned at intervals. A quaint fire-board with yellow damask fluted over it into a "rising sun," with some mirrors, and pier- and card-tables of lustrous old mahogany, completed the outfit of this fascinating room, in the like of which we may safely imagine Mistress Dolly as exerting her charms and graces over the visitors who came flocking to the White House, as well as to Montpellier, her country home in the foothills of the Blue Ridge in Virginia. Mrs. Madison it was who, on the approach of the British to the capital in 1814, broke the frame of the portrait of Washington fastened to the White House wall, and rescued the canvas from the chance of removal or destruction by the foe, carrying it with her in her temporary flight from the city.

Following in the footsteps of Mrs. Mad-

ison walked Mrs. James Monroe, formerly Miss Eliza Kortright, of New York, a renowned belle after the Revolution. The young lady's friends

had, indeed, thought she might do much better in the matrimonial mart than become the wife of the plain little Virginian Congressman. But she had been serenely happy in her life with the man of whom Mr. Jefferson said "his soul might be turned inside out without discovering a blemish to the world"; and through him, also, had come to her the worldly rewards of high place in his country's diplomatic service abroad, culmi-

nating now in the highest position in the nation's gift.

Mrs. John Quincy Adams, the daughter of Joshua Johnson, a Maryland squire and statesman, was born in London and lived abroad for years, her marriage with Mr. Adams occurring while he was Minister Resident at The Hague, a position he afterward exchanged for St. Petersburg and London. Her life in Washington during the eight years that Mr. Adams was Secretary

of State had given high evidence of her grace and ability as an entertainer, but while in the White House she was overshadowed by ill health, withdrawing from all but those formal appearances in public which she could not officially avoid.

A letter penned by a long-gone hand concerning domestic life at the White House in Mrs. Jackson's time, supplies the following:

"The large parlor was scantily furnished: there was light from the chandelier, and a blazing fire in the grate,



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MRS. CLEVELAND.



MISS CLEVELAND.

four or five ladies sewing around it; Mrs. Donelson, Mrs. Andrew Jackson, Mrs. Edward Livingston, et cetera. Five or six children were playing about, regardless of documents or work-baskets. At the farther end of the room sat the President in his arm-chair, wearing a long, loose coat and smoking a long reed pipe, with bowl of red clay, combining the dignity of the patriarch, monarch and Indian chief."

The "bonny brown wife" of that soldier-President, the lithe, dark Rachel Donelson, who in her youth "danced on the deck of a flatboat or took the helm while her father took a shot at the Indians," now appeared short and swarthy and fat. Before her arrival at the White House in 1824, the political opponents of the General had set afloat a hundred stories of her rough looks and ways. A caricature of the day represented her standing on a table, the fashionable dames of Washington engaged in dressing her appropriately, with Mrs. Edward Livingston lacking her stays. But

before long, death interposed to remove the good lady from the scene, and Mrs. Donelson, wife of Jackson's nephew and secretary, took her place as presiding genius of the White House.

Mrs. Donelson is known to fame for her firm attitude in refusing her uncle's behest to call on the celebrated Mrs. Eaton, and, in so doing, costing her husband his post as secretary.

Mrs. Van Buren, daughter-in-law of the

President, preceded the charming bevy of gentlewomen composing the household of President Tyler, whose last marriage, to the beautiful Julia Gardiner, of Gardiner's Island, New York, occurred at the White House.

Mrs. Polk, lovely, well-bred and winning, was considered a trifle austere in her views of religious observance as applied to the life of every day.

Mrs. Fillmore and her attractive daughter were followed by Mrs. Pierce, whose delicate health made her rather a shadowy image in the White House galaxy.

Miss Harriet Lane, the fair and stately niece of President Buchanan, who had presided over her uncle's household while he was Minister to England, had the manners and bearing of the great world, and bore her part in the Executive pageant like one to whom the right to wear ermine was a natural inheritance.

The other ladies of the shining list—Mrs. Lincoln; Mrs. Johnson and her daughter, Mrs. Patterson; Mrs. Grant; Mrs. Hayes; Mrs. Garfield; Mrs. McElroy, sister of President Arthur; Miss Cleveland and Mrs. Cleveland; Mrs. Harrison, and Mrs. McKinley—belong to contemporaneous history.

To look back upon these august dames in



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MRS. MCKINLEY.

line, after Mrs. Washington, from the day of the first occupation of the White House, is to see projected into the foreground of the canvas Mrs. Adams, Mrs. Madison, Mrs. Monroe and Mrs. Polk among the by-gones; Miss Lane and Mrs. Cleveland in the array of moderns, each supremely possessed of the personal distinction, social faculty and grace, of the typical American woman called to the forefront of conspicuous position in her native land.